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# MINUTES FROM FULL COUNCIL MEETING

**Held on:** Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> April at 7.00pm. This was a virtual meeting On Zoom

**Attendance:** Councillors S Hale (Vice Chair to item 12.6), M Harrison (Chair), C Inchley, G Kennedy (from item 12.5), M Lovell, G Mayall, T O'Connor, N Shearn (from item 12.5)

**Present:** C Starkie, Town Clerk

**Public:** 2 members of the public.

**The meeting commended with One Minute's Silence for His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021, at the age of 99.**

**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME:** There were no public questions.

## TC12.1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors A McGuire, B Height and N Tolson.

## TC12.2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

## TC12.3 Chairs Announcement

There were no Chair's announcements.

## TC12.4 To Consider and approve the minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 16th March 2021

The minutes from this meeting were accepted by the council as a true record and signed by chair

### Resolved that:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were agreed and signed

## TC12.5 Local Government Reorganisation

Councillors received a written report from Cllr O'Connor on the town council's response to the government consultation of the Somerset Local Government Reorganisation. Councillors discussed the position of the town council in relation to the 2 proposals, and what the draft response from the council to the consultation should be. Individuals were also encouraged to submit their own response. The Chair read out the comments of a councillor who could not attend, which were a preference for the One Somerset proposal.

Issues raised in the discussion were that:

The One Somerset proposal (led by SCC) did not offer sufficient change, financial savings were up front and it was not known how many staff would be made redundant. It was not clear if the SHAPE building in Shepton Mallet would be retained. If One Somerset succeeded it would be the second largest unitary authority in England, but with only 100 councillors to service an enormous area and 278 town and parish councils. This was a major concern as their workload would be stretched and likely to attract candidates who were either retired or who could afford to live on expenses offered for the role. The demand of daytime meetings and dealing with ward matters would be a strain. There was also concern that this proposal might continue with an unbalanced of funding in the western part of the county.

The Stronger Somerset proposal (led by the district councils) had considered more of the complexities and had considered the devolution of assets and services and boundary changes in the future. It also proposed a total of 200 councillors across the two areas, thus more people to deliver the work.

It was summarised that the initial purpose of the reorganisation was to address issues around inadequate investment in younger people, social care and a housing crisis, yet the One Somerset proposal did not tackle those key issues.

Ultimately councillors, and the town council, existed to serve the community and to make the people's lives in that community better, and the One Somerset proposal did not meet that expectation. The town council was currently having to fund significant projects that should be funded by Somerset County Council, who had a poor track record, and there was concern that the One Somerset proposal would see a significant increase in council tax bills on local residents.

*Cllr Hale left the meeting.*

There was a brief discussion on the devolved assets and services that might be made available or that the town council might like to pursue. The council would be interested to negotiate with MDC for the West Shepton Playing Fields and take this opportunity to create a greater space for sport and recreation.

The discussion concluded with how the council would respond. All were in agreement to delegate responsibility to the Town Clerk to respond to the public consultation in accordance with the report provided for this meeting.

Resolved that:

The response, as per Appendix A in the report, be submitted to the government consultation.

**TC12.6 To transfer temporary responsibility for the function of Responsible Financial Officer to the Town Clerk**

Councillors noted the resignation of Mrs Evans from the role of Responsible Financial Officer, and that while a permanent solution be sought, to transfer the function and responsibility of Responsible Financial Officer to the Town Clerk.

Resolved that:

The Town Clerk take on the role of Responsible Financial Officer on a temporary basis.

**TC12.7 Date & Time of Next Meeting**

It was acknowledged that there were some issues to resolve with future meetings, due to the removal of the authority to meet virtually, the need to hold an annual meeting in the month of May and the Covid-19 regulations needing to provide a safe location. Alternative meeting venues were suggested, and it was agreed by all that it was preferable to meet later in May, after the by-election, to ensure that new councillors could participate in meetings. Therefore, it was proposed and agreed that the next meeting would be after the by-election, to be confirmed by the Town Clerk.

The meeting closed at 1954 hrs.

## Appendix A

### **Questions on the proposal for two unitary councils from Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West & Taunton Council and South Somerset District Council**

**Q1. Is this proposal likely to improve local government and service delivery across each area? Specifically, is it likely to improve council services, will it give greater value for money, generate savings, provide stronger strategic and local leadership and create more sustainable structures?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below:*

Yes, this proposal would be likely to improve both local government and service delivery across the new areas of East and West Unitaries.

We believe that this proposal is also likely to improve council services and in turn give greater value for money.

Whilst it may not generate as much initial savings as the other proposal, it does in the longer term appear to have more sustainable structures and in particular will provide much stronger strategic leadership and local leadership than the other proposal.

**Q2. Where it is proposed that services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint than currently, through some form of joint arrangements, is this likely to improve those services? Such services may for example be children's services, waste collection and disposal, adult health and social care, planning, and transport.**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

Yes, we believe that these proposals are likely to improve those services and we have confidence that this proposal will deliver via a maximum co-operation for cost benefit.

**Q3. Is this proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

No, we don't believe that this proposal would impact on other services delivered such as outlined above.

**Q4. Do you support this proposal from the councils?**

Yes  No

*Please explain below*

Yes. We have looked carefully at both proposals and believe that this proposal, i.e. the Stronger Somerset would be more beneficial for Shepton Mallet, its people and in turn the Town Council, as there is more emphasis on delivering locally

**Q5. Do the unitary councils proposed by this proposal represent a credible geography?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

Yes. Having studied both proposals, in our opinion, this proposal clearly represents the more credible geographic area. Although both unitaries would be smaller at the outset than the other proposal, the population of Somerset will undoubtedly increase significantly and this bid takes that into account and is therefore future proofed in a way that the other bid is clearly not. Also, the size of Somerset and the different parts of the county and demographics are matched in a more sophisticated approach and understanding than the other proposal.

**Q6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in this area?**

As an ambitious Town Council, Shepton Mallet wants to progress its neighbourhood plan and deliver the best for our residents.

Whilst we agree with the need that a re-organisation of local government is long overdue for Somerset, we feel this also represents a clear opportunity to deal with some of the structural deficiencies of the current three tiers of local government that have hindered those different levels over the years.

After reviewing both proposals, we believe that the Stronger Somerset proposal represents the most realistic approach to resolving those issues and shows more appreciation of the complexities of service delivery in Somerset.

More clarity in this proposal is required regarding the co-development around Charters/locality agreements and community networks in-regards to devolution of assets to a town council like Shepton Mallet.

However, overall, we believe the two unitaries proposal will better serve Shepton Mallet.

## Appendix B

### Questions on the proposal for one unitary council from Somerset County Council

**Q1. Is this proposal likely to improve local government and service delivery across each area? Specifically, is it likely to improve council services, will it give greater value for money, generate savings, provide stronger strategic and local leadership and create more sustainable structures?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

Yes, this proposal would be likely to generate savings, through reducing duplication of work and staff.

But also No, in that, it is not clear whether this would in turn mean an improvement in council services. And also No, in that we do not feel that it is likely to provide a stronger strategic or sustainable structure.

We equally do not see the required level of local leadership in the proposal.

**Q2. Where it is proposed that services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint than currently, through some form of joint arrangements, is this likely to improve those services? Such services may for example be children's services, waste collection and disposal, adult health and social care, planning, and transport.**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

**Q3. Is this proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

No, we don't believe that this proposal would impact on other services delivered such as outlined above.

**Q4. Do you support this proposal from the councils?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

No. We do not support this proposal. have looked carefully at both proposals and believe that this proposal, i.e. the Stronger Somerset would be more beneficial for Shepton Mallet, its people and in turn the Town Council, as there is more emphasis on delivering locally

**Q5. Do the unitary councils proposed by this proposal represent a credible geography?**

Yes  No

*Please explain your reasoning below*

No. Having studied both proposals, in our opinion, this proposal simply does not represent a credible geographic area. It is just too big and does not take into account future population increases or the vast size of Somerset.

**Q6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in this area?**

As an ambitious Town Council, Shepton Mallet wants to progress its neighbourhood plan and deliver the best for our residents. Whilst we agree with the need that a re-organisation of local government is long overdue for Somerset, we feel this also represents a clear opportunity to deal with some of the structural deficiencies of the current three tiers of local government that have hindered those different levels over the years.

After reviewing both proposals, we do not believe that the One Somerset proposal represents a realistic approach to resolving those issues. Its simplistic approach that big is better simply does not demonstrate an appreciation of the complexities of service delivery in Somerset. There is a huge amount of economic imbalance that the Local Community Networks simply will not deliver on.

The risk of service delivery failure in this proposal, especially for towns such as Shepton Mallet already remote from Taunton is much higher in this proposal than the Stronger Somerset proposal.

We believe the two unitaries proposal will better serve Shepton Mallet.

*End*